A call to awaken the heart for *tawbah*

- O man! How sinful and foolish you are not to know the worth of the bounties of your Provider. After having spent years in disobedience and after prolonged disloyalty to such a merciful Lord, Who has provided all the means of your comfort and ease - without there being, *na`udhu bi Allah,* any imaginable benefit to Him - having violated His sanctities and taken shamelessness and recalcitrance to their extreme, now that you are remorseful, penitent and repentant, God Almighty has taken you as His loved one. What an abundance of mercy and plenitude of bounty! O God! We are incapable of thanking You for Your bounties. Our tongues are unable to praise and extol You. All that we can do is to bow our heads in shame and ask Your pardon for our shamelessness. We don't deserve Your mercy. Indeed, Your mercy is more abundant and Your bounties are more inclusive than can be described.
- A wise man should endeavour to intensify the form of contrition and grief in the heart so that God willing, it sets aflame the fire of remorse. That is, through meditation about the terrible consequences of sin, remorse becomes stronger in his heart, thereby voluntarily kindling the holy fire, the fire about which Qur'an says: *The fire of God kindled (roaring) over the hearts, a vault upon them, in outstretched columns* (104:6-8). In his heart, burning the fire of remorse will incinerate all his sins and burn away all its rust and corrosion. He should know that were he not to kindle himself this fire in this world and were he not to open upon himself the door of this hell, he would inevitably pass from this world into the next world to face the terribly cauterizing fire prepared for him there. Thereupon the doors of Hell shall be opened and the doors of Paradise closed to him. A wise person thus realises the grave consequences of his sins.
- O God! Give us a chest lit with the fire of remorse. Set our hearts aflame with the worldly fire and set it afire by throwing into it the sparks of remorse. Remove the rust of our hearts and take us from this world in a state of freedom from the consequences of sins. Surely You are the Lord of bounties. [Adopted from Al-Khumayni, *Forty Hadith*, chapter 17, '*Tawbah*']

Conclusion:

- Imam Zain al-Abidin (a) said: "**My God ! You are He who has opened a door to Your pardon and named it 'repentance' for You said, '*Repent to God with unswerving (sincere) repentance'* (66: 8). What is the excuse for him who remains heedless of entering the door after its opening?**" [*al-Sahifa al-Kamilah*, The Whispered Prayer of the Repenters]

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O you who believe! Turn (in repentance) to Allah with sincere repentance; Perhaps your Lord will remove your evil from you…
(Qur'an, 66: 8)

The Prophet of Allah (s) said: There are four signs of one who is repentant: 1) He is sincere to God in his actions 2) He shuns falsehood 3) He is firmly attached to truth and 4) He is eager to do good.
[Al-Harani, *Tuhaf al-`Uqool*, p. 20]

Merits of the Soul …

Repentance
(*tawbah*)

Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (a) said: "When a servant turns to God with sincere repentance (*tawbatun nasuh*), God loves him and covers him (i.e. his sins) in the world and the Hereafter." I said, "And how does He cover him?" The Imam (a) replied, "He makes the two angels (assigned to write his deeds) forget that which they have written of his sins. Then He inspires his limbs (saying), 'Conceal his sins,' and He inspires places of the earth (saying), 'Conceal the sins that he used to commit over you.' Then he meets God in such a manner that there is nothing to bear witness against him regarding any sin."
[Al-Kulayni, *al-Kafi*, kitab *al-'iman wa al-kufr*, bab *al-tawbah*, hadith #1]

The reality of *tawbah*

Tawbah means return to the soul's initial spirituality after the light of its human nature (*fitrah*) and its spirit has been covered by the darkness of sins and disobedience. The human soul in its initial state has neither any spiritual virtues nor any vices. It is capable of reaching any station, but in its original state it is pure, sinless and has an intrinsic luminosity. The perpetration of sins causes obscurity within the heart, and the light of intrinsic nature is extinguished and converted into darkness. However, before total darkness envelops the heart, if a person awakens from the slumber of negligence and makes repentance, the soul gradually returns from the darkness to the light of its original nature and essential spirituality. This is mentioned in the famous hadith from Imam Baqir (a):"**One who repents from sin is like the one who has not sinned..**" [Al-Kulayni, *al-Kafi,* kitab *al-'iman wa al-kufr*, bab *al-tawbah*, hadith #10]

The essentials and conditions required for *tawbah*

Tawbah is not accepted from one who merely declares, "I repent." There are a number of conditions which must be fulfilled before the acceptance of *tawbah*. These are mentioned below in the following hadith:

- It is narrated that someone said: *Astaghfirullah* (I seek God's forgiveness) before Imam 'Ali (a). He said to him. "May your mother mourn for you! Do you know what *istighfar* is? Verily *istighfar* is a degree of the *'illiyyun* (people of high station) and it is a word that means six things. **First** is remorse over the past**. Second**, the resolution not to return to it ever. **Third**, to return to creatures their (formerly usurped) rights so that you meet God Almighty in a state of purity in which no one has any claim against you. **Fourth**, that you fulfil every duty that you neglected in order to satisfy your obligation in respect to it. **Fifth**, that you attend to the flesh of your body that has grown on unlawful nourishment so that it melts away as a result of grief and mourning and your skin adheres to your bones, after which new flesh grows in its place. **Sixth**, that you make your body taste the pain of obedience in the same way as it earlier tasted the pleasure of sins. When you have done these things then say *Astaghfirullah!* [*Nahj al-Balagha*, saying # 417]

This noble tradition mentions two prerequisites for *tawbah* (remorse and resolution), two important conditions for its acceptance (returning the rights of creatures and of the Creator), and finally two points for the perfection of repentance.

Tawbatun nasuh (sincere repentance)

According to great researcher al-Shaykh al-Bahai (qs), there are several meanings of *tawbatun nasuh*. A few of them are mentioned below:

- *Tawbah* that 'advises' the people, i.e. it invites them to simulate him (the repenter) on account of the good effect produced in the repenter, or *tawbah* that 'counsels' the repenter to root out sins and never return to them again.
- *Tawbah* that is done purely for God's sake, similar to the pure honey that is free from wax, and thus called *`asalun nasuh*. Sincerity requires that the remorse should be on account of the ugliness of sins and the displeasure of God, and not from fear of the hellfire.
- The word *nasuh* is also related to *nasabah* which means tailoring, because *tawbah* sews together the body of faith which is torn by sin, and because it joins the penitent person to God's *awliya'* (friends) and His lovers in the same way that separate pieces of cloth are joined together by tailoring.
- Yet another interpretation says that *nasuh* is an attribute of the penitent and *tawbatun nasuh* is a *tawbah* whose performer admonishes himself to take part in a perfect repentance until the effects of sins are totally purged from the heart. This task is only attained by causing the soul to taste regret and grief and by clearing its darkness caused by past sins with the light of virtuous actions.

The sooner, the better...

Successful *tawbah* is a difficult task. Indulging in sins, especially major and mortal ones, cause a person to become totally forgetful of *tawbah*. If the tree of sins growing in the orchard of the human heart reaches maturity and its roots become strong, the results are calamitous, causing a person to turn completely away from repentance. Even when the thought of *tawbah* occasionally comes to his mind, he postpones it from one day to another, and from one month to the next, telling himself, "I will make sound repentance at the end of my life and in old age." This is wishful thinking. Such a person cannot perform *tawbah* after the roots of sinfulness have grown deep into his personality. The best time for *tawbah* is youth when sins are fewer, the inner darkness of the heart is incomplete and all the conditions of *tawbah* are easier to fulfil. This God-given opportunity should be availed at all costs and one shouldn't pay heed to satanic whisperings to postpone *tawbah*. And therefore, one should do *tawbah* as soon as possible after a sin is committed. An intelligent person who realizes this fact, abstains from sins, and undoes wrong committed in the past. His penitent heart filled with remorse, develops a firm determination to quit sinful life. God helps him and if his *tawbah* is sincere, he becomes the beloved of God as mentioned in the holy verse: "*Verily God loves the repentant"* (2: 222)

- Imam 'Ali (a) said: **"If you want to win His blessings in the next world, today is the day of preparation while tomorrow is the day of reward. The place to proceed to is Paradise while the place of doom is Hell. Is there no one among you to repent for his deeds before his death, compensate for wrongs he has done, and do good before the calamity of retribution descends upon him?"** [*Nahj al-Balagha*, sermon #33]